

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Michael L. Green)	C/A No. 0:16-3046-MGL-PJG
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	
v.)	REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
)	
Vernetia Dozier; Harold Young, <i>Orangeburg County</i> ,)	
)	
Defendants.)	
)	

The plaintiff, Michael L. Green, a self-represented state pretrial detainee, brings this civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. This matter is before the court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2) (D.S.C.). Having reviewed the Complaint in accordance with applicable law, the court concludes that it should be summarily dismissed without prejudice and without issuance and service of process.

I. Procedural Background

Plaintiff, a pretrial detainee at the Orangeburg Calhoun Detention Center since November 2015, complains that there is black mold “all over the walls” and dust covering the ventilation system. (ECF No. 1 at 4, 8.) He claims this has caused itching, coughing, and a runny nose. He seeks \$50,000 in compensatory damages and to have the conditions fixed. (*Id.* at 5-6.)

II. Discussion

A. Standard of Review

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* Complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915, 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, and the Prison Litigation Reform Act (“PLRA”), Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321

(1996). This review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr., 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995); Todd v. Baskerville, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983).

The Complaint has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit. To protect against possible abuses of this privilege, the statute allows a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action “fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted,” “is frivolous or malicious,” or “seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief.”¹ 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B). A finding of frivolousness can be made where the complaint “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” Denton, 504 U.S. at 31. Hence, under § 1915(e)(2)(B), a claim based on a meritless legal theory may be dismissed *sua sponte*. Neitzke, 490 U.S. 319; Allison v. Kyle, 66 F.3d 71 (5th Cir. 1995).

This court is required to liberally construe *pro se* complaints. Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007). Such *pro se* complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, *id.*; Gordon v. Leeke, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. Hughes v. Rowe, 449 U.S. 5, 9 (1980); Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319 (1972). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint, the plaintiff’s allegations are assumed to be true. Erickson, 551 U.S. at 93 (citing Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555-56 (2007)).

¹ Screening pursuant to § 1915A is subject to this standard as well.

Nonetheless, the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim cognizable in a federal district court. See Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990); see also Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 677-78 (2009) (outlining pleading requirements under Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for “all civil actions”). The mandated liberal construction afforded to *pro se* pleadings means that if the court can reasonably read the pleadings to state a valid claim on which the plaintiff could prevail, it should do so; however, a district court may not rewrite a complaint to include claims that were never presented, Barnett v. Hargett, 174 F.3d 1128 (10th Cir. 1999), construct the plaintiff’s legal arguments for him, Small v. Endicott, 998 F.2d 411 (7th Cir. 1993), or “conjure up questions never squarely presented” to the court, Beaudett v. City of Hampton, 775 F.2d 1274, 1278 (4th Cir. 1985).

B. Analysis

In this action, Plaintiff alleges the detention center he is housed in is moldy and dusty. The court construes this as a claim that the defendants have violated the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment by being deliberately indifferent to Plaintiff’s living conditions and medical needs. A legal action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 allows “a party who has been deprived of a federal right under the color of state law to seek relief.” City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes at Monterey, Ltd., 526 U.S. 687, 707 (1999). To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege: (1) that a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988). However, as discussed below, the court finds that Plaintiff’s Complaint should be dismissed for failing to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B(ii)).

Claims that detention center officials were deliberately indifferent to the medical needs or conditions of confinement of pretrial detainees are evaluated under the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment rather than under the Eighth Amendment's proscription against cruel and unusual punishment. See Martin v. Gentile, 849 F.2d 863, 870 (4th Cir. 1988) ("The due process rights of a pretrial detainee are at least as great as the eighth amendment protections available to the convicted prisoner; while the convicted prisoner is entitled to protection only against punishment that is 'cruel and unusual,' the pretrial detainee, who has yet to be adjudicated guilty of any crime, may not be subjected to any form of 'punishment.' ") (citing City of Revere v. Mass. Gen. Hosp., 463 U.S. 239, 244 (1983)). A defendant is deliberately indifferent if he has actual knowledge of a substantial risk of harm to a detainee and disregards that substantial risk. Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 847 (1994).

Plaintiff fails to allege any facts in the Complaint that relate to the named defendants. Consequently, Plaintiff has failed to provide any facts that would show the defendants had actual knowledge that the detention center's living conditions or Plaintiff's itching, coughing, and runny nose constituted a substantial risk of harm to Plaintiff. See Farmer, 511 U.S. at 847. Moreover, as to Plaintiff's claim of deliberate indifference to medical needs, Plaintiff has failed to show that his alleged medical ailments were sufficiently serious to invoke constitutional protections. See Iko v. Shreve, 535 F.3d 225, 241 (4th Cir. 2008) ("[A] 'serious medical need' is 'one that has been diagnosed by a physician as mandating treatment or one that is so obvious that even a lay person would easily recognize the necessity for a doctor's attention.' ") (quoting Henderson v. Sheahan, 196 F.3d 839, 846 (7th Cir.1999)). Accordingly, Plaintiff fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.

III. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, it is recommended that the Complaint be dismissed without prejudice and without issuance and service of process.

October 17, 2016
Columbia, South Carolina



Paige J. Gossett
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

*The parties are directed to note the important information in the attached
“Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation.”*

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’” Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co., 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); see Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Robin L. Blume, Clerk
United States District Court
901 Richland Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).